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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY

DEMOCRATIC STEERING AND  
POLICY COMMITTEE

**Testimony of the Honorable Bill Pascrell, Jr. for  
The House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health Legislative Hearing  
“Examining Proposals that Provide Access to Care for Patients and Support Research for  
Rare Diseases.”  
Wednesday, June 14, 2023**

I thank Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Health Subcommittee Chair Brett Guthrie, and Ranking Member Anna Eshoo for your important work in holding this critical hearing. This committee has an important opportunity to show needed leadership and support for protecting the health of our nation’s firefighters.

Supporting research for deadly diseases is one of the most effective ways in which the federal government can invest in improving the health outcomes of our citizenry. I am grateful that my bipartisan bill, the Firefighter Cancer Registry Reauthorization Act of 2023 (H.R. 3821), is a part of today’s discussion. I appreciate the support of Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick, Steny Hoyer, and Mike Bost, who are the co-chairs of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus and are my co-leads on H.R. 3821.

While the immediate, physical toll of the firefighting profession is tangible, the effects of exposure to deadly toxins and carcinogens can take years to develop. In 2015, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) published a multi-year study which found that firefighters are nine percent more likely to develop cancer and 14 percent more likely to die from cancer relative to the general population. Cancer is now the leading cause of death for firefighters.

Nearly three years ago, Paterson, New Jersey firefighter Jerry Behnke tragically lost his life to cancer. He was a leader in our community. He embodied the very best of public service. He was my dear friend.

We have found that this story is too common. Eduardo Diaz of Hasbrouck Heights was a career firefighter at North Hudson Regional who we lost to cancer six years ago at the age of 53.

When someone is diagnosed with cancer, information about their cancer is reported to the cancer registry in their state. However, specific details about their work are not taken into account. By collecting occupational information, the National Firefighter Registry allows researchers to better understand cancer and its risk factors in the fire service.

Congress created the Firefighter Cancer Registry by passing my bill (H.R. 931) into law in 2018 to study the relationship between long-term exposure to dangerous fumes and toxins and the

incidence of cancer in firefighters. In April 2023, the registry officially opened. Since then, the volunteer registry has already signed up thousands of firefighters. This is the largest effort in our nation's history to understand and reduce cancer among firefighters.

H.R. 3821 would simply reauthorize the registry for five years at a modest level of funding needed to continue this important mission.

I am pleased to have worked with the many prominent firefighting organizations on this legislation to ensure our government is doing more to combat this pernicious disease. Thank you to the International Association of Fire Fighters, New Jersey Firefighters Mutual Benevolent Association, International Association of Fire Chiefs, Congressional Fire Services Institute, and National Volunteer Fire Council.

Congress should act expeditiously to reauthorize the Firefighter Cancer Registry and I thank the committee for holding this hearing on our bipartisan bill.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Pascrell Jr." in a cursive script.

Bill Pascrell, Jr.  
Member of Congress